

## STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION, INCLUDING DIVERSE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

### Background

Too often, parents face significant barriers and challenges that must be overcome in order to effectively participate in their child's education. For many parents, simply figuring out the access points to the school system – who to contact, how can a parent be involved – is a significant challenge. Language is a major barrier to communication between home and school for parents with limited English language skills, language minority parents who have limited education in their native countries and who may not read or write their native languages, and English-speaking parents who are illiterate. Many parents are faced with the challenge of attending work or a school function. Their work schedules often make it impossible to attend school functions and/or oversee their children's homework. Immigrant parents who have an "undocumented status" are reluctant to participate in their child's educational experience for fear of being reported to federal authorities.

In order to provide opportunities for parents and the community to engage in activities and programs designed to increase their knowledge of and participation in public education and the advancement of academic excellence for all students in the District of Columbia, it is imperative that the District implement effective and inclusive strategies for increasing parent and community involvement as a critical part of high quality education. Such strategies must work to remove the many barriers and challenges faced by parents who desire to be involved in their children's education. School personnel should be educated on the positive effects of parent and community involvement and how to create a climate that is not culturally and/or racially biased and is open and hospitable. With an effective parent and community involvement plan, all parents will have the opportunity to participate in their child's education regardless of their cultural background, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status. The Fenty Administration is committed to encouraging and facilitating meaningful parental and community involvement.

There are six types of parent and community involvement, which will manifest differently among parents and community<sup>1</sup>:

1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning At Home
5. Decision- making

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<sup>1</sup> Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, K.C., Sanders, M.G., & Simon, B.S. (1997). School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## 6. Collaboration with the Community

### **Strengthening Parent and Community Involvement**

The Fenty Administration will seek to build capacity for effective involvement by:

- Assisting parents, when appropriate, to understand the state's academic achievement assessments and the requirements of Section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind Act;
- Providing materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their achievement and speaking skills via literacy training and technology;
- Educating principals, teachers, and other staff on the value of active parent involvement at their local school, and methods to reach out to parents as equal partners;
- Coordinating and integrating parent involvement programs and activities with other programs (e.g. Title 1, Title IV, preschool) to support parents in more fully participating in their children's education;
- Ensuring that every parent, regardless of language proficiency, can receive information about school and parent activities that is in a language and format that is understandable to them;
- Providing reasonable support for parental involvement activities as parents may request;
- Providing necessary literacy training for parents;
- Training parents to enhance the involvement of other parents;
- Arranging school meetings at a variety of times, or conducting in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, and parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school;
- Respecting immigrant communities' native languages and cultures, but at the same time, helping immigrant students and parents learn English well; and
- Hiring, training, and retaining competent staff to provide appropriate services to immigrant students.

Because the parental involvement has both state and local components, both the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) should develop effective parental involvement strategies. The following are specific activities or services that the Mayor will prioritize through OSSE and DCPS:

#### *Parent Handbook*

The parent handbook will be a comprehensive guide to K-16 education. All public, charter & private schools participating in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program will be listed. Information regarding parent's rights under No Child Left Behind, the

DCPS Out-of-Boundary process, early childhood programs, Out-of-School Time programs, and options for post-secondary & continuing education also will be included. The Parent Handbook could be available at schools and public libraries, on the web, and available upon request in different languages.

#### *Parent Workshops and Seminars*

Workshops and seminars should be conducted throughout the city on parents' rights and responsibilities, special education, parental involvement, school choice options and other rights under the No Child Left Behind law, and other topics that interest parents or the community.

#### *Community Partners*

The District will develop an aggressive outreach strategy for community-based organizations and businesses to obtain support for parent involvement activities. There are many organizations already providing services, support, information, and training for parents – the Administration will identify potential partnership opportunities that could enhance services being provided by the state and local education agencies and reach residents through established quality programs.

#### *Parent Academies*

The OSSE will develop parent training courses in partnership with local businesses, organizations and educational institutions. The courses could be offered at area schools, libraries, businesses, houses of worship, non-profit organizations and government offices. Such training could provide parents with the skills and tools necessary to engage with their child's school. For instance, training could be offered for parents about how to read report cards and tell if their child is learning at grade level in school; why parent-teacher conferences are important and what questions to ask of the teacher; where to go for information and answers to routine questions; and what to expect and how to prepare for the college application process.

#### *Parent Advisory Council*

A Parent Advisory Council (PAC) should be established to regularly advise the OSSE on matters related to parental involvement. They will also help create and update the parent handbook, newsletter, parent/community survey, and state parental involvement policy.

#### *Parent Quarterly Newsletter*

This quarterly publication will highlight the progress and successes of public education programs in the District. It will include a message from the Deputy Mayor for Education, current workshops and activities, and articles on parent and community involvement. The newsletter will be available at schools and public libraries, on the web, and available upon request in different languages.

*Professional Development for Educators*

Educators will have an opportunity to attend workshops and seminars that will strengthen their skills for building parental and community involvement at their local schools and enhance their understanding of other cultures. The Administration also will work with community members and institutions of higher education to identify a cultural competency training program that will meet the needs of the community.

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